

PAGE 4-A

WASHINGTON TIMES
19 February 1987

CIA limits covert aid in wake of Iran deal

By Bill Gertz
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

CIA support for covert activities has been restricted since agency rules were violated in a 1985 arms shipment to Iran, acting Director Robert Gates said yesterday.

A presidentially approved intelligence finding now is required before the CIA gives logistical help in secret operations, Mr. Gates told the Senate Intelligence Committee during the second day of hearings on his nomination as the agency's head.

"As I learned of the events that took place between November 1985 and November 1986, I issued an instruction to those managing our operational assets that they should assume from the beginning that a finding is required ... for any use of those operational assets — aircraft, etc." he said.

Secret shipments of U.S. arms to Iran in November 1985 were authorized retroactively. The White House issued an intelligence finding on Jan. 17, 1986.

The 1974 Hughes-Ryan Amendment requires the president, in authorizing covert actions, to "find" that a proposed operation is necessary to national security. The law was passed to prevent the "plausible denial" of senior officials' involvement in risky and potentially embarrassing secret operations.

Mr. Gates said he verbally advised the head of the CIA's Operations Directorate, Clair E. George, of the restriction and planned to notify the directorate formally in writing about the policy change.

Future requests for logistical support provided by CIA operatives, "will be assessed very closely" by legal experts assigned to the operations directorate to ensure that no prohibitions on covert activities are violated, he said.

President Reagan on Feb. 2 named Mr. Gates to replace the ailing William Casey who underwent surgery in December for a cancerous brain tumor.

Mr. Gates, 43, will be the youngest man ever to head the CIA if he is confirmed.

Despite a stormy session yesterday as senators continued to criticize him for his role in the Iran-Contra affair, several lawmakers said



Photo by Stephen Crowley/The Washington Times
Acting CIA Director Robert Gates testifies.

privately he was likely to be confirmed.

Committee Chairman David Boren, Oklahoma Democrat, said the panel planned to question Mr. Gates in closed session next week. A vote on the nomination was not expected, he said, until after release of the final report of a special White House commission investigating the Iranian arms sales and the diversion of proceeds to the Nicaraguan resistance.

The commission, headed by former Sen. John Tower, is scheduled to release its report on Feb. 26. A spokesman said members today would interview former National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane, a key figure in the Iran scandal, who is recuperating in Bethesda Naval Hospital after an apparent suicide attempt.

Most of the questions put to Mr. Gates by the Intelligence Committee sought to establish his knowledge of the Iran-Contra affair and his activities at the CIA during the 18-month-long initiative.

Sen. Bill Bradley, New Jersey Democrat, accused Mr. Gates of "passing the buck" by not acting quickly on information about a possible diversion of money to the Contras.

Mr. Gates replied, "The fact is that the basic thrust was not to sit on the information, not to cover up."

Instead, Mr. Gates said he instructed a senior CIA analyst who suspected the diversion to inform "higher levels of the agency."

"You call that passing the buck," Mr. Gates told Mr. Bradley. "I call it trying to get the information into the hands of those better prepared to evaluate it."